The Love of God's Children. Luke 6:27-38

Difficult and Good

Sometimes you know something will be simultaneously difficult and good, like climbing to the top of a mountain to see the sunrise – effort and exhilaration; or learning a language, or putting into practice these words of Jesus.

Luke 6: [27] "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Difficult, because we do have enemies.

Whether they are people who oppose us personally at work or in the family, or just strangers who want to harm us by scamming our money or stealing our car, or people who are our collective enemies, who oppose our Christian faith, perhaps for its social influence or because it is out of step with some modern views of sexuality and gender, the modern equivalents of the people Jesus spoke of in 6:22, the people who exclude, insult and slander believers

Luke 6: [22] Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you, insult you,
and slander your name as evil
because of the Son of Man.

Difficult, because we do have enemies – those who harm, mistreat and wish us ill and whom we would prefer to avoid or triumph over, not love them

And difficult, because we have fears. Andy mentioned a big one last week – the fear of losing control and becoming vulnerable to the words and actions of others, being hurt by others. And there is also the fear of becoming poorer – not having enough; the fear of being used – not treated with respect; the fear of having our reputation damaged and what that means for the way we think of ourselves and the way we are regarded by those around us.

We have enemies, we have real fears, and some of us also find Jesus' words difficult because even at the best of times we find it hard to love – to give thought to the welfare of others in busy and self preoccupied lives

We know the life Jesus calls His followers to can be difficult

But at the same time we sense its goodness,

Good for us not to be trapped in mutual hatreds

Good for our society if people are committed to not taking revenge

Good for all where all are committed to treating v. 31 others as they themselves would want to be treated

Good if people are committed to countering entrenched divisions by not responding to hostility and suspicion with hostility and suspicion

We sense the goodness of Jesus' way, the more so as we feel our society being caught up in entrenched divisions, mutual suspicions, and a cycle of increasingly bitter recriminations.

There is a timeliness in our hearing today Jesus calling His people to be different, of our being called to commit ourselves to this difficult but good way of love, these words Jesus spoke to 'those who listen.'

Luke 6: ***27*** *"But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you,* ***28*** *bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

Jesus introduced His teaching in chapter 6 with the blessings and woes we looked at last week. Having addressed His woes to the rich He now refocuses on His disciples, instructing them and us in how to live in a world where not all will follow the Lord Jesus, where they will continue to experience the conflicts and injustices of a world where people reject God's rule in favour of their own as well as the hostility of those who reject them for their following of Jesus.

He speaks to His followers. He is not giving instructions to government, who are entrusted with the responsibility of wielding the sword, punishing evildoers and protecting their citizens from those who would harm them. These words are about how each of us as private citizens should conduct ourselves.

And the headline is – Love your enemies

The Big command – Love your enemies

Love your enemies. Jesus acknowledges in Matthew that this is counterintuitive. The common approach

Matthew 5: **43** "You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor** and hate your enemy.

Or at least ignore them and have as little to do with them as possible.

But Jesus gives a positive command, creates a positive duty for his followers to love our enemies

And he helps us identify our enemies and what loving them looks like in the three phrases that follow

Our enemies are those that hate us – they take every opportunity they have to do us harm; and curse us – in their culture cursing was calling on God to harm someone, in ours it is more often verbal abuse that seeks to denigrate and hurt us, and our enemies are those who mistreat or abuse us – particularly where they have power over us.

You can probably think now of some people like that in your life .

They may be in your work, or even in your family. But perhaps you are blessed not to have any in your close circle. They may be more distant from you – people in our wider society who you identify as threatening our collective prosperity and freedom – like those who burn houses and cars for profit, or enslave people to drugs; or perhaps those who expose your children to destructive teaching on gender fluidity or sexual immorality, or those who are determined to erode Christian influence and freedoms in our society, people you don't know personally but whose activity angers you and whose influence you resent.

We do have enemies – and we shouldn't pretend we don't. There are those determined to harm, to denigrate, to mistreat us.

And we are to love them.

What does that look like? Jesus says it means

Doing them good, not harm. What in particular that looks like depends on the kind of relationship you have with them, what opportunities you have to do them good. It could be anything from minding their children when they are sick, to stopping and giving first aid when the car they have stolen has crashed, or preserving for them the same freedom of speech you want. Opportunity and relational proximity will determine the good we can do them, but some things we know are never good, such as slandering and misrepresenting people

Blessing them – appealing to God to do them good, not cursing them

Praying for them – yourself seeking their good from God, and particularly seeking their repentance and finding mercy in Jesus.

The kinds of good we can do and seek are many and varied, but Jesus illustrates the application of the command to love our enemies and do good to them in vv. 29-30.

[29] If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don't hold back your shirt either. [30] Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don't ask for them back.

That is the way to think of these verses – as illustrating applications of love, not a new law.

As Leon Morris observed, taking these literally would mean "there would soon be a class of saintly paupers, owning nothing, and another of prosperous idlers and thieves," or, as another commentator observed, taking the command about cloaks and shirts literally would mean lots of naked and semi naked Christians.

But what is Jesus illustrating?

A gracious and committed generosity to those who are our enemies and to those who are undeserving.

That gracious generosity will seek to persevere in seeking the other person's good in the face of insult – we are told that slapping someone on the cheek was an insult so serious that the victim could take the perpetrator to court. That slap was a burning and very public humiliation. But the one who loves their enemy, who seeks their good, especially the good of hearing the gospel – rather than seek judicial revenge – will run the risk of further harm by persevering in speaking with them.

That same gracious generosity is called for in dealing with those who want to make themselves richer by making you poorer. V. 29 b *And if anyone takes away your coat, don't hold back your shirt either* is not talking about theft. Matthew locates a similar saying in the law courts. The one who takes the coat is the person who has taken the outer garment as pledge [*Matt. 5: [40] As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well*. Deut. 24:10-13] and not returned it as he should. Rather than become embittered and resentful, the follower of Jesus responds with extraordinary generosity that makes them the benefactor of their oppressor.

And that generosity is generalised in v. 30.

[30] Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don't ask for them back.

We may not, as Augustine observed, give them what they ask for, recognising that sometimes giving people what they ask for is a denial of love, but love engages with the need, doesn't just shut the door or brush them off, and does not let love of possessions stop that engagement. And love is so generous that it wants the person who has taken our things blessed by our possessions, and does not ask them back. Love seeks to bless and do good, even to those who seek our harm, or are indifferent to our good.

And having given these illustrations Jesus gives instruction that will guide our love in all situations.

[31] Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them.

The them is all people we may come across, but in this context it definitely includes our enemies.

We have to imagine ourselves in the other person's position, stand, as the saying goes, in his or her shoes and think what we would like others to do for us in that situation – and having thought that out, we then have to do it.

Remember, it is a positive command, a command, Not just to think or feel, but to do.

We don't love others in the way Jesus wants just by refraining from doing to others what we wouldn't want done to us.

It is positive – we must treat others in the way we would want to be treated in that situation.

So if you can imagine that when you serve in a shop would want to be treated with courtesy and honesty by customers

You would treat all those who serve you with courtesy and honesty – not just refraining from angry criticism

If you were supporting our democratic process by handing out how to vote cards, and thought in that situation you would want people to engage with you with civility and respect, you will engage with people at the polling booth, no matter what their political affiliation, with courtesy and respect, not just refrain from letting them know what you really think of them and their cause and how it is destroying, in your view, the state

If you, when you ventured to make a comment on the on line world, would want people to engage with your arguments and not heap personal abuse on you, so you must do the same.

If you could imagine yourself arriving to study in a country where you had no family and know that in that situation you would like not just to be left alone but to get to know some families, you would invite that overseas student home

If you could imagine yourself arriving in a new country as a refugee with little English and no work, and know that in that situation you would like to be treated with kindness and patience and practical help, then, whatever views you might have about border control and immigration numbers, you know that the Lord Jesus expects you to show kindness, and patience, and practical help.

The applications are endless, and no amount of illustrations would exhaust them – which puts the responsibility on you, those who listen, to think through what committing yourself to love as Jesus commands in your relationships and everyday engagements with others will look like.

31 *Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them*.

Including your enemies.

Loving the other is that simple – needing only a little thoughtfulness

But is it that simple?

Often, usually, it is that simple. But not always, because some situations are a little more complex

Take Jesus' illustrations – the simplest one

Give to everyone who asks you

What if you are living with a gambling addict, or someone who is addicted to drugs, someone who spends whatever they get on their destructive habit.

They will always be asking for money, maybe pressuring you, badgering you to be generous like a Christian should.

They may even be stealing from you

When they ask, as they do, should you keep giving to them as it appears Jesus commands?

Here we must let the command to love our enemies and the command of v. 31 guide our response

Notice Jesus doesn't say

Just as others want you to do for them, do it for them

He says ***31*** *Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them*.

And He is speaking to his disciples.

A disciple of Jesus would never want someone to help, to facilitate their sinning, just as genuine love for an enemy – and a gambling addict or drug addict will do you harm even if they protest love – will never want to entrench them in their rebellion to God.

Nor does genuine love want to empower someone's destructive addiction

Giving to the addict what they are asking for in this case is not love – at best it is indifference to their welfare or a selfish getting rid of their annoyance, or at worst hatred.

It will take a lot more thought to know what doing good for them looks like, good to which you as a disciple are committed

Thought that must be informed by truth – the truth of their circumstances, and the truth of Scripture so we know what it is to love.

In this example love might mean Helping them face the situation, get help, maybe even going to the police or their employer.

If you are in a dreadful situation like that – talk – one of the pastors

But I have raised this example to make two points - that love sometimes means saying no and resisting evil, and that sometimes love takes both hard thinking and courage

For it can be difficult to say no to someone you live with

Jesus' illustrations are just that – not commands

But what they illustrate – that generous love to all, including our enemies

The love that will pay a cost, material or personal or both to do good,

The love that doesn't seek to do harm in turn, that doesn't close its heart

Is not negotiable.

If someone insults, or greedily exploits

We can't respond with an anger that damns them, or a resentment that seeks to take revenge. Rather we love them and seek their good, even if it means loss to us, leaving, as Paul says in Romans 12, judgement to God [Romans 12:14-21]

And if someone asks, imposes on us with their need, our response must be shaped by love

We can't say no because we love our possessions, or because we are afraid of losing control, having our plans derailed

We can't say no to treating others as we would want to be treated because they are in a class of people we resent – because of their race, or politics, or wealth or lack of it

We can't say no because in our fear of loss or being used we have chosen to be guided by a commitment to self protection, to shielding ourselves from the demand to love others.

Because that is not what Jesus commands

Luke 6: [27] "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

And saying no to loving in the name of protecting Himself was not the way the Lord Jesus, whom believers say they follow, lived

Jesus loved His enemies and sought their good

All who are determined to live as rebels to God's just and loving rule are Jesus' enemies, for He is the King of God's Kingdom. TO set yourself against God by disobeying His commands, to choose to ignore God, or fail to give Him thanks for the life and gifts He gives us, is to be a rebel against Jesus' rule, to constitute yourself as His enemy.

But Jesus sought the good of His enemies by loving His Father and obediently going to the cross to die for sinners, to bring them the good of forgiveness and peace with God.

Jesus loved His enemies in His death, and

Jesus' life was one of generous, gracious love to His enemies

In His love HE always spoke the truth to them, including the truth of God's judgement, seeking their repentance even when it provoked opposition

In His love He wept over that judgement that would come on those who rejected Him – He was not indifferent, or consumed with rage at their rejection Lk. 19:41-44

From the cross He prayed for those who mistreated Him

Luke 23: [34] Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided his clothes and cast lots.

Prayed even as they took not just His clothes, but everything, life itself, from Him

He never returned their evil with evil

As Peter says:

1 Peter 2: [21] For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. [22] He did not commit sin, ***and no deceit was found in his mouth;*** *[23] when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*

It is clear the Lord Jesus loved his enemies, did good to those who hated Him, blessed those who cursed Him and prayed for those mistreating Him

Luke 6: [27] "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

He is calling us to be as He was in the world

The teaching of Jesus

The example of Jesus

Love your enemies

So, how are you going, follower of Jesus, in loving your enemies

When others mistreat you – how do you respond?

When you think their actions or views are harming you, or your society, what is in your heart?

When their needs or the needs of others impose on you?

Shut them out, cut them off

Studied Indifference

Maybe anger, and a determination to get you own back

Or a determination to love them, to do them good, to pray for them

Luke 6: [27] "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Jesus is clear, and Jesus is insistent that His people must be different, distinguished by this love like His

[32] If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. [33] If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. [34] And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. [35] But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.

Christians must love each other, but we can't just love each other. As our Lord says, what credit to us if we love those who love us. That is pretty much universal. Most of the world practices reciprocal relationships, lives in networks of mutual obligation – practicing 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back"

That is what v. 34 - lending from whom you expect to receive - is especially speaking about. Jews were not permitted to charge interest. Lending was not for profit, but for crisis relief. Even sinners lend in the expectation that the favour would be returned if the lender ever needed it. That was the repayment in full

But Jesus expects His followers to love, not just beyond those who love us, but those who hate us, to do good and lend where there is no expectation of reciprocity, to love out of a generous grace.

Three comments.

Jesus' words brings home how shameful it is when Christians don't love each other – when we are worse than sinners

It happens – Paul could speak of the Galatian believers biting and devouring each other, and some Corinthians believers taking each other to court. Gal. 5:15, 1 Cor. 6

And sometimes churches can even seem to encourage a selfish preoccupation by suggesting that congregations are consumers of religious experiences provided by professionals – whether that is priests or worship leaders, reinforcing our individualistic focus on self.

But believers are not consumers. We are disciples of Jesus together, disciples who are to be known as disciples by our loving each other as Christ loved us.

There must be practical care for each other in a Christian congregation. You are not here for you – you are here for the Lord and his body, and mustn't shame Him by our lovelessness

Secondly, while loving community is needed and expected, we can't see that as an end in itself.

Over the years I have seen many of you have worked hard and intentionally at building community – serving together, helping each other – whether it is with school pickups, moving house, meals

Good and encouraging

But the love we show to each other our Lord says we must show to others, outside.

If we make a loving community – where we know each other and feel loved – an end in itself

We will fail in the love our Lord expects us to show

We will have trouble welcoming new people amongst us, for bringing someone new into our lives and relationships always disturbs what is there already

We will have trouble welcoming needy people – for we might feel fully committed in a community that works for us, and need requires time, effort, thought that can detract from maintaining what we have

And we will have trouble, perhaps especially those with responsibility for maintaining our community life, in strengthening and encouraging each other's loving service in the world where we are much more likely to have opportunity to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, for that service can compete with the needs of our church community

But we cannot make our enjoying a good community life an end in itself

Trusting obedience to the Lord Jesus is our goal, and the Lord who commands us to love each other also tells us to love our enemies, and to give time and thought to doing them good, blessing them and praying for them

Thirdly, being different in this way, in loving not just those who love us but also loving our enemies, is a large part of our being salt and light in the world.

One of the ways the world is always going off is through dividing into competing factions and tribes, drawing boundaries around the group and restricting love and care and respect to those within the group – those whose thinking and attitudes are right, and showing suspicion and hostility to those outside the group, the wrong thinkers. And the risk, heightened by the rhetoric of those seeking to exploit differences to gain power, is that competition becomes conflict, that argument grows into violence, is always there.

And one of the ways darkness spreads is by the propagation of half truths and lies about the other, including lies about their basic humanity – again with terrible outcomes, whether, for example, it is the holocaust with lies about Jews, or the Rwandan genocide

But Christians, who know their first loyalty is to the Lord, Jesus, and not to any human class or ideology or culture or racial group, are determined to love their enemies, to treat everyone – no matter what their group, as we would want to be treated, as equal to ourselves in deserving consideration, and to never returning evil with evil

In a society intent on nurturing differences into divisions we are salt and light by being faithful to the Lord Jesus - ***35*** *But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.* And supporting each other in that, even if it comes at cost to our sense of community

But what encouragement does Jesus give His followers to live this difficult life of different love?

35 But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then [and] your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

The reality of being a disciple

The Lord Jesus encourages His disciples in their persevering obedience by reminding them and us of the reality of being His disciple, a reality expressed in reward and relationship

Reward

Jesus does not say love your enemy 'in order that you might have a great reward' as if reward is the reason we live this way.

You cannot live a radically unselfish life motivated by the selfish desire for personal reward, still committed to strict reciprocity

He just states the fact. The reward is the reward of being Jesus faithful follower. As you are my disciple living trusting and obeying my word you have a great reward, my gift of the kingdom to all who follow me.

It isn't earned. It always remains a gift, another expression of our God's gracious generosity to those who, as our Lord reminds us in Luke 17:7-10, are still unworthy servants when we have done all that is asked of us

It isn't earned, But it is real – the disciples sure possession.

Think again of Jesus' examples of love vv. 29-30

That loss of property we must be willing to surrender to generously love our enemy and enrich them

That can never make us ultimately poor

In that obedient loss following Jesus you are just confirming you are eternally rich

In giving up in generous love what you were always bound to lose at death, you are ensuring your participation in an eternal possession

Remember disciple – in following me, relying on me, your reward is great, the kingdom of heaven

Relationship

And you are children of the most high, in your actions confirming that reality by demonstrating in your kindness to the ungrateful and evil the family likeness.

Again, you don't earn this exalted relationship by your obedience. That obedience demonstrates and confirms the reality of Jesus' disciples, that trusting Him we have been adopted as God's children

Children of the most High – think of the wonder of that

The living, almighty Creator – unlimited in power, in knowledge, eternal – regards us as His children, belonging to Him, the objects of His affection and Fatherly care,

Sharing in His riches and life

Think again of the public humiliation of the insult – that slap

Our enemies may make us want to feel a certain way, induce in us shame and anger that will make us want to withdraw or retaliate

But none of their words and actions can change the believers reality – we are God's children – and we continue to act in generous love, undeterred, because of whose family we belong to

Why keep on loving your enemy? Remember what is yours and who you are in believing in me

And Remember what you have already received in believing in me

Our Experience of mercy

Like all we have experienced God's kindness to the ungrateful and the wicked

We experience it every day as our God causes

Matthew 5: ***45*** *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

[Acts 14:17, Matt. 5:48, Psalm 145: 9,15-16]

That kindness is abundantly seen in his continuing generosity to Australia even as many turn their back on Him

But believers have also received God's mercy

36 *Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*

We know our Father is merciful because it is only because of His mercy we can call Him Father.

His mercy in sending the Lord Jesus into the world to save sinners

His mercy in giving the Son to die on the cross to reconcile us to Himself

His mercy in calling us to trust the Lord Jesus, in opening our eyes to see His glory

And it is this mercy we continue to rely on as we love imperfectly

A mercy that restores us, that patiently nurtures the family character in us

It is that experience of mercy that is to shape all our interactions with others – verse 37-38 – but that must be for next week

What encouragement does Jesus give to do as He commands?

Remember who you are and what is yours in following me, and the life transforming experience of mercy you have had in trusting me

Being Jesus' person is the encouragement to live His way

Highlights what is always the issue in obeying the good but difficult commands of Jesus – trusting Jesus

And that is how we are to address our fears, fears that might be holding us back from loving – our enemies and all

the fear of losing control

the fear of becoming poorer

the fear of being used

fear for our reputation

We need to learn that it is enough that the Lord Jesus who loves us is in control, that in Him we will be kept now as we seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and will be secure forever, that those who obey Him are never fools, and that it is what He thinks of us, not what the world thinks, that really matters

If you are going to overcome your fears to live as our Lord commands Jesus must grow great in your heart to have the greatness that is His now, reigning with all authority, and you must grow in your confidence in His love – you can pray for that, can't you

What Paul prays for in Eph 3

*Ephesians 3:**16** I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, **17** and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, **19** and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

And if you are struggling to obey the Lord Jesus – the hurt is so great, the anger so deep,

If you are going to change from hatred to love, from a desire for revenge to a determination to do good to your enemies – it is only by trusting Jesus

For the new life and continuing work of His Spirit in you bearing the family likeness

And you can ask for that as you ask for forgiveness for harboured resentments and neglected prayers for our enemies

*Luke 6: **27** "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

This is not advanced Chrisianity – it is basic Christianity

What our Lord calls from us all – difficult, but so good

So believer, commit yourself to live this way

Remembering our Lord's love for you when you were His enemy –

That love for you is sure - He wants your good, and His commands are for your good

And He knows what is involved in keeping His command – you can draw near to Him for help

And He is risen – His kingdom is sure, great and certain is your reward

Trusting Him, be children of your heavenly Father and bring Him glory by your obedience